

NCLB and Accountability Q & A



How are school report cards put together and what information do they provide?

Reports on individual schools are part of the annual district report cards, also known as local report cards. Each school district must prepare and disseminate annual local report cards that include information on how students in the district and in each school performed on state assessments. The report cards must state student performance in terms of three levels: basic, proficient and advanced. Achievement data must be disaggregated, or broken out, by student subgroups according to: race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status, disability status and low-income status. The report cards must also tell which schools have been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring (defined in Q-and-A below: "What if a school does not improve?").

How can parents see these local report cards, which include school-by-school data?

States must ensure that the local districts make these local report cards available to the parents of students promptly and by no later than the beginning of the school year. The law requires that the information be presented in an "understandable and uniform format, and to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents can understand." States and districts may also distribute this information to the media for publicizing; post it on the Internet; or provide it to other public agencies for dissemination.

Further, local school districts must notify parents if their child's school has been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring (defined in Q-and-A below: "What if a school does not improve?"). In this event, districts must let parents know the options available to them. Also, districts must annually notify parents of students in Title I schools of their "right to know" about teacher qualifications and how to exercise it.

What information is provided on state report cards?

Each state must produce and disseminate annual report cards that provide information on student achievement in the state--both overall and broken out according to the same subgroups as those appearing on the district report cards listed above. State report cards include:

- State assessment results by performance level (basic, proficient and advanced), including (1) two-year trend data for each subject and grade tested; and (2) a comparison between annual objectives and actual performance for each student group.
- Percentage of each group of students not tested.
- Graduation rates for secondary school students and any other student achievement indicators that the state chooses.
- Performance of school districts on adequate yearly progress measures, including the number and names of schools identified as needing improvement.
- Professional qualifications of teachers in the state, including the percentage of teachers in the classroom with only emergency or provisional credentials and the percentage of classes in the state that are not taught by highly qualified teachers, including a comparison between high- and low-income schools.

What is "adequate yearly progress"? How does it help to improve schools?

No Child Left Behind requires each state to define adequate yearly progress for school districts and schools, within the parameters set by Title I. In defining adequate yearly progress, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement--measurable in terms of student performance--that

school districts and schools must achieve within time frames specified in the law. In general, it works like this: Each state begins by setting a "starting point" that is based on the performance of its lowest-achieving demographic group or of the lowest-achieving schools in the state, whichever is higher. The state then sets the bar--or level of student achievement--that a school must attain after two years in order to continue to show adequate yearly progress. Subsequent thresholds must be raised at least once every three years, until, at the end of 12 years, all students in the state are achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in reading/language arts and math.

What if a school does not improve?

States and local school districts will aid schools that receive Title I funds in making meaningful changes that will improve their performance. In the meantime, districts will offer parents options for children in low-performing schools, including extra help to children from low-income families. The *No Child Left Behind Act* lays out an action plan and timetable for steps to be taken when a Title I school fails to improve, as follows:

- A Title I school that has not made adequate yearly progress, as defined by the state, for two consecutive school years will be identified by the district before the beginning of the next school year as *needing improvement*. School officials will develop a two-year plan to turn around the school. The local education agency will ensure that the school receives needed technical assistance as it develops and implements its improvement plan. Students must be offered the option of transferring to another public school in the district--which may include a public charter school--that has not been identified as needing school improvement.
- If the school does not make adequate yearly progress for three years, the school remains in school-improvement status, and the district must continue to offer public school choice to all students. In addition, students from low-income families are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, such as tutoring or remedial classes, from a state-approved provider.
- If the school fails to make adequate progress for four years, the district must implement certain *corrective actions* to improve the school, such as replacing certain staff or fully implementing a new curriculum, while continuing to offer public school choice and supplemental educational services for low-income students.
- If a school fails to make adequate yearly progress for a fifth year, the school district must initiate plans for *restructuring* the school. This may include reopening the school as a charter school, replacing all or most of the school staff or turning over school operations either to the state or to a private company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness.

In addition, the law requires states to identify for improvement those local education agencies that fail to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years or longer and to institute corrective actions.

How are teachers or schools rewarded for doing well?

No Child Left Behind requires states to provide state academic achievement awards to schools that close achievement gaps between groups of students or that exceed academic achievement goals. States may also use Title I funds to financially reward teachers in schools that receive academic achievement awards. In addition, states must designate as distinguished schools those that have made the greatest gains in closing the achievement gap or in exceeding achievement goals.

What can parents do to help their child's school succeed and meet the accountability requirements? How does the law help parents become involved?

No Child Left Behind supports parent involvement because research overwhelmingly demonstrates the positive effect that parent involvement has on their children's academic achievement (Clark 1983; Comer 1980, 1988; Eccles, Arbreton, et al., 1993; Eccles-Parsons, Adler and Kaczala 1982; Epstein 1983, 1984; Marjoribanks 1979 as cited in Eccles and Harold 1996). In the event a school is identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring, the law requires the local education agency to notify parents accordingly and to explain to them how they can become involved in school-improvement efforts. In any event, the law requires the same agency to provide parents with local report cards, which include data on each individual school in the district, as described earlier. Thus, parents have up-to-date information about their child's school, which they can use in whatever manner they choose to be involved. Parents may help their child's school in a number of ways, including: Attending parent-teacher meetings or special meetings to address academic problems at the school; volunteering to serve as needed; encouraging other parents to become involved; and learning about the school's special challenges, community resources and the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In addition, parents should take advantage of the increased flexibility given local decision-makers by *No Child Left Behind* and talk with their school board members, principals and other state and local education leaders about which programs they think will help their students the most. In addition, the law has other specific requirements on parent involvement that include the following:

- Each state education agency must support the collection and dissemination of information on effective parent involvement practices to local education agencies and schools.
- The law in Title I spells out specific measures that local education agencies and schools receiving Title I funds must take to ensure parent involvement in significant areas, including: overall planning at the district and school levels; written policies on parent involvement at both levels; annual meetings; training; coordinating parent involvement strategies among federal education programs (i.e., Title I, Head Start and Reading First); and evaluating those strategies and revising them if needed.
- Schools that have schoolwide programs must involve parents in developing plans for such programs--that is, programs designed to raise the achievement of low-achieving students in high-poverty Title I schools by improving instruction throughout the entire school (thus using Title I funds to serve all children).

The law provides for involvement of parents of private schools students served by various federal education programs such as Title I.

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